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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004048

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: JAM FREEZE CONTINUES UNTIL GOD AND SADR SAY
OTHERWISE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3242 (SADR'S CEASEFIRE)
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3821 (IRAN IS EVERYWHERE)
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 3375 (SADR-BADR AGREEMENT)
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 3961 (WE ARE ALL BROTHERS)

Classified By: PolCouns Matt Tueller. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Roughly three months after Muqtada al-Sadr ordered a six-month "freeze" of military activity by his Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) militia, the mercurial cleric issued a lengthy internet statement December 2 in which he ordered continuation of the freeze "until Almighty God wills otherwise;" lashed out repeatedly at the U.S. "occupation;" and accused Shia political rivals of collaborating with the USG to oppress his followers through recent crackdowns in Karbala and Diwaniyah. At roughly the half-way point of Sadr's six-month freeze period, the trend of decreased JAM attacks and increased Sadrist amenability to engagement with Americans has continued since our Ref A assessment of freeze compliance. MNF-I and other reporting indicates that JAM attacks on MNF-I and GOI security personnel are lower than pre-freeze levels but have not stopped, as some JAM Special Groups and others who purport to act in Sadr's name continue to inflict casualties through EFP attacks and rocket/mortar salvos. Sadrists and observers tell us that Sadr ordered the freeze to consolidate his authority over a loosely-organized and fractious organization that operates at once as a political movement, a private army, and a mafia-like criminal enterprise, and the freeze has already prompted some disaffected Sadr lieutenants to form splinter groups. In order to exploit and encourage continuation of the freeze order, we continue to pursue and expand all lines of contact with Sadrists with the message that while the freeze announcement is a step in the right direction toward non-violent, non-coercive Sadrist participation in Iraq's democratic political system, we remain watchful of freeze compliance and will respond according to what happens on the ground. Although it remains uncertain whether Sadr's freeze order is anything more than a strategic pause to wait out the surge, it has helped to contribute to Iraq's improving security environment. End Summary.

Attacks Reduced But Not Ended, Sadr Upholds Freeze

[1](#)2. (S) MNF-I and other reporting indicates overall JAM compliance with the freeze order, especially among mainline elements. According to RSO data, indirect fire (IDF) attacks against the International Zone (IZ) have decreased dramatically during the freeze period: there was a single attack in September, and October marked the first full calendar month since May 2005 without IDF attacks on the IZ. A Thanksgiving Day barrage of 1 rocket and 27 60mm mortar shells was a notable exception to the relative calm, however, though some observers speculate that the attack was intended as a warning shot across the Coalition/GOI bow in reply to its crackdown on JAM in Karbala and Diwaniyah. Sporadic but lethal IDF attacks launched from JAM-controlled areas on

MNF-I and GOI security installations have continued over the past 90 days, albeit at a reduced pace from pre-freeze levels. Similarly, the frequency of explosive formed penetrator (EFP) incidents - the signature attack mode of JAM Special Groups - has dropped from pre-freeze levels, but lethal attacks targeting Coalition and ISF personnel continue at the hands of Sadrists elements who believe they are exempt from freeze adherence or refuse to honor freeze terms. The freeze order appears to have had mixed impact in Iraq's central and southern provinces, where the security situation is far more dependent on local than national conditions, and PRTs will report on compliance septel.

13. (S) The written affirmation of a continued freeze ended speculation that mounting impatience and frustration within JAM ranks would pressure the thirty-four year old Sadr into publicly rescinding the freeze order. Up to that point, the order had already withstood several major tests and strains over the past 90 days, including an October MNF-I raid against criminals in Sadr City that resulted in limited civilian casualties but induced howls of highly emotional, vitriolic protest from the local media and some political figures; periodic clashes between JAM and the ISF in Basrah; and, most worrisome and existentially problematic from a Sadrist perspective, a recent ISF-led, Coalition-supported crackdown on JAM elements in Karbala, Diwaniyah, and other places in Central Iraq which many Sadrists perceived as an attack by their arch-rival Badr militia operating under GOI cover. In his internet statement, however, Sadr thanked the JAM "lions" for following his freeze edict, told them he prayed that God would make them "examples of patience" and "reward their patience with paradise," and asked JAM members to continue to abide by the freeze order "until Almighty God wills otherwise." The statement was likely cooked up while

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Sadr was ensconced in his Iranian lair: Mohsen al-Hakeem, the son of the ISCI chairman and himself a Tehran resident, told us Sadr has a house in Tehran, and we understand he has spent time in Qom as well.

Oppression By "Occupiers" And Iraq Collaborators

14. (S) Sadrist legislator Baha al-Araji told us Sadr's followers are "poor, angry, and uneducated Shia who have been oppressed for years" (Ref B), and Sadr's December 2 statement was replete with language and symbols designed to move a downtrodden and religious-minded following: Islamic imagery and repeated references to Shia suffering and victimization were interwoven with Sadr's trademark refrain that American "occupation" is the root of all Iraq's problems. For example, Sadr cited a verse from the "Infidels" chapter of the Koran to "address the biggest evil, Bush, and tell him: Get out of our land, we do not need you and your armies, the armies of darkness ... or your policies or interference, or your false democracy and freedom." Sadr called upon his followers to follow the example of Shia icon Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad "when he said 'we will never submit.' We say the occupation will never support us because our only supporter is God... We have our land and you have yours, you have your democracy and we have our Islam, so leave our land and go." He noted the irony that while numerous timetables have been imposed on Iraqis to demonstrate progress (a possible reference to benchmarks), no such timetables have been demanded from "the occupier" regarding departure from Iraq.

15. (S) Employing numerous quotations from his late father, the source of much of his popular legitimacy, Sadr also accused the USG of "controlling the Iraqi government, resources, wealth, and destiny" and of using Iraqi confederates "to spread discord among the brothers to destabilize Iraqi security and create pretexts to remain on Iraqi land." As evidence, he cited recent Coalition-GOI operations in Karbala, Diwaniyah, and other places that resulted in the arrest and detention of dozens of Sadrists:

"God saved us from the oppression of Saddam only to fall under the oppression of our brothers." Sadr demanded release of eight high-profile Sadrists/JAM detainees (including Special Groups leader Qais al-Ghazali) and taunted his Shia rivals Da'wa and Badr with accusations of complicity in the "occupation," asking rhetorically whether Badr participated in such operations "for money or to enable the occupiers to remain in Iraq?"

¶6. (S) In the wake of an October non-aggression pact signed by Sadr and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)/Badr leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem (Ref C), sources from both groups tell us that while their officials meet periodically to discuss problems, relations between the Sadrists and ISCI/Badr remain tense and occasionally degenerate into violence. Sadrists have told us there is widespread belief within the group that the USG is allied with ISCI/Badr (an organization which, in the Sadrist view, owes its first allegiance to Iran), has joined with Badr-controlled GOI security personnel in anti-JAM crackdowns in Karbala and Diwaniyah, and is working to delay provincial elections for fear that the Sadrists will rout ISCI/Badr at the polls. The Sadrists have also used Hakeem's recent visit to the U.S. to tar him as an American stooge, with senior Sadr aide Salah al-'Ubaidi describing the visit in a December 7 sermon as "submission to despotism and injustice and a sell-out of the history of the Marja'iyah" (a term denoting the Najaf clerical leadership once led by Hakeem's father).

¶7. (S) After seeking God's blessing for "the believers, the long-suffering, the mujahideen, the martyrs, and the detainees," Sadr's statement calls upon his followers to "be united and to support each other." This could be read as a reaction to recent fractures within Sadr's large and loosely-organized organization. For example, former Sadr lieutenant Adnan Shahmani has reportedly broken away from the Sadrist Trend to form "the Iraqi National Gathering," a collection of Sadrists who Badr Commander Hadi al-Amri and Shia independent legislator Sami al-Askari characterized as "moderate." The "Gathering" claims to remain loyal to the teachings of Muqtada's father, but members are reportedly disenchanted with Muqtada's political leadership and his perceived inability to deliver anything of value to the Shia masses. We have heard reports of disaffected JAM and Special Group leaders who may be heading small splinter groups that do not feel compelled to honor the freeze. We have also received reports that Sadr and his inner circle intend to purge or punish disloyal and disobedient elements, though there is no evidence to suggest implementation of such designs.

Continued Interest In Engagement

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¶8. (S) The trend of increased Sadrist amenability to engagement with the Mission and MNF-I has continued. Local JAM leaders have participated in a GOI-sponsored reconciliation drives in Baghdad's mixed Shia/Sunni neighborhoods of al-Jihad and al-Amal, efforts which brought them into direct contact with MNF-I officers. Baghdad ePRT cultivation of Sadrist Trend notables in Sadr City has evolved to the extent that they arranged a recent CODEL meeting with Sadrist officials that prompted one Sadrist to gush that "we are all brothers" (Ref D). Although the Sadrist Trend's CoR bloc leader refuses to meet with USG officials, his chief deputy Baha al-Araji has spoken openly and frankly to Mission and MNF-I personnel, though future meetings are in question due to Baha's claimed concern that his prior meetings have been "reported to Najaf," headquarters of the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS).

¶9. (S) MNF-I is leading an evolving engagement with a group of Sadrists from the Karbala, Najaf, and Diwaniyah areas that calls itself the "Mid-Euphrates Awakening" (MEA). Headed by

men claiming to be senior OMS and JAM officials who purport to speak on behalf of sixty percent of JAM members, they claim a desire to work together with the USG to counter Iranian influence, which they claim is Iraq's greatest long-term threat. Asserting that "the Persians" have established an intelligence presence throughout Central and Southern Iraq, the interlocutors contrasted Iran's long-term intentions with short-term "invasions" by the British, the Turks, and now the Coalition. They expressed incomprehension over USG "blindness" to the Iranian threat and our reluctance to take action, adding the wholly self-serving observation that MNF-I targeting of Sadrists furthers Tehran's designs by removing the last bastion of Iraqi opposition to the "Iranian occupation." As in other Sadrist engagements, they asked for MNF-I release of specific detainees. It remains unclear whether the group is actually comprised of core Sadrist leaders or if they operate with the overt or tacit support of Muqtada or his senior aides, though we have heard a similar professed anti-Iran message from Baha al-Araji and other Sadrist contacts.

Comment And A Look Forward

110. (S) Describing Muqtada as a "complicated simple man" who neither fears nor respects anyone, including Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, senior ISCI advisor Mohsen al-Hakeem recounted an anecdote that may provide insight into Sadr's thinking. As Mohsen and his father Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem were haggling with Sadr several months ago in Tehran over terms of the Sadr-ISCI non-aggression agreement (according to Mohsen, the contentious talks were marred by extended Sadr harangues and calculated displays of disrespect toward the elder Hakeem), Sadr reportedly scoffed at Hakeem's suggestion that they focus on the future by retorting that he is concerned only with today and today's reality. Other interlocutors have commented on Sadr's tendency toward mood swings and abrupt changes of direction, and his propensity to shuttle between different sets of advisors. We think it likely that Sadr pursues his related and mutually-reinforcing prime goals - driving the U.S. out of Iraq and installing himself at the helm - in a manner whereby tactical details are worked out on the fly and subject to change at his whim, and not as a product of prolonged strategy deliberation between Sadr and a circle of seasoned advisors. Indeed, the accelerated decision-making "process" that resulted in the JAM freeze order seems in part to reflect this. It thus remains unclear whether Sadr's freeze is anything more than a strategic pause that allows him to sit out the surge, preserve the bulk of his forces from attrition, repair his organization's tattered public image in the wake of August JAM violence in Karbala, and sharpen the knives in anticipation of a showdown with ISCI/Badr, possibly in connection with as-yet unscheduled provincial elections.

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